

GOD'S PEOPLE PURSUE HOLINESS

YEAR: TRANSFORM / FOCUS: I AM IN CHRIST
SERIES: GOD IS HOLY—I AM A SINNER/SAINT

BIG TRUTH: GOD'S PEOPLE PURSUE HOLINESS

Romans 3:9-18; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5-8; Galatians 2:20; 1 Peter 1:13-16; Romans 6:11; Colossians 3:5-10; Galatians 5:16-25

BIBLE VERSE: EPHESIANS 5:1-2

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

BIG IDEAS

- Pursuing holiness is impossible apart from a heart transformation.
- Pursuing holiness is motivated by the gospel.
- Pursuing holiness is choosing to reject and flee what is sinful and unwise.

BIBLE PASSAGE: EPHESIANS 5:1-14

TRANSFORM - I AM IN CHRIST

The Transform Year is an exploration of what it means to become a "new creation" in Jesus. (2 Corinthians 5:17) In order for this to happen, we must first find our identity in Him. Many of us live in a consistent state of identity crises. We wrestle with questions like who am I, where do I belong, why do I exist? The answer to these questions is found in Jesus. Our prayer for this semester is that like the Apostle Paul we would be able to say, "I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Galatians 2:20).

SERIES AIMS



Every student should know that...

- God is holy and we are separated from Him in our sin.
- The gospel transforms sinners into saints.
- The Christian life is about becoming who we already are in Christ.



Every student should feel...

- The depth of their sin against the holy God.
- Wonder and awe at the good news of the gospel.
- Secure in the identity that they now have in Jesus.



Every student should strive to...

- Read the entire book of Ephesians
- Memorize the Bible Verse each week during the Ephesians series.
- Learn how to use a commentary.



Every student should want to...

- Be transformed by the gospel.
- Put sin to death and pursue holiness.
- Share the good news of the gospel.

GUIDES AND WORKOUTS

The Guide provides a commentary page on each week's Bible verse and on each Big Idea that unpacks the Big Truth. Each week also includes a Student Workout as a resource to help the student pursue spiritual disciplines on their own. Additionally, each week has a Family Workout that helps equip parents and guardians to have spiritual conversations with their student.

BIBLE VERSE: EPHESIANS 5:1-2

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

God's children should seek to imitate Christ with their lives.

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.”

- Paul spends the latter part of chapter four of Ephesians explaining the way God makes us completely new creations through Christ. He takes our sinful, broken hearts and makes them new, setting us free from the sin nature that once enslaved us. As he begins chapter five, Paul describes the behavior that should characterize a believer. Because we get to call God Father and become part of His eternal family, we should seek to be like our heavenly Father.
- Paul tells the Ephesians to be imitators of God. This means that as believers, we should always seek to put on the attributes of God that are humanly possible. We should seek to imitate God as our heavenly Father the same way a child seeks to be like his earthly father.

Imitating Christ means our lives are marked by Godly love.

“And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us,”

- Being like Christ means loving like He loves. Paul explains the way believers should walk in love by using Christ as the example. Our love should be like Christ's. This means that it is sacrificial, patient, gracious, and forgiving. Every part of Jesus' life on earth was marked by love for God and for mankind. Our lives should be the same.
- As we imitate Christ, our lives should be marked by obedience to God out of our love for Him and a love for other people that sets us apart from unbelievers. We should love others by sacrificing for them, forgiving them, showing them grace, and being patient. These are just a few traits that imitate God's love.

Our lives should be marked by holiness.

“a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

- Jesus' sacrifice of Himself was pleasing to God because Jesus was perfect. Because He had no sin, the sacrifice He made was like a fragrant offering to God. As we seek to imitate God, our own lives should be marked by our seeking to be holy. We can be holy because God cleanses us through Jesus and applies His righteousness to us. He also gives us His Spirit, which empowers us to be like Christ. As believers, we will pursue holiness because God is holy.

BIG IDEA #1: PURSUING HOLINESS IS IMPOSSIBLE APART FROM A HEART TRANSFORMATION.¹

[THIS]

Previously in Ephesians 4:17-32, Paul described the new creation that believers become when they have saving faith in Jesus. Now in chapter 5, Paul begins to describe the pursuit of holiness that every believer begins and continues throughout their earthly lives. We are called God's beloved children because He transforms our hearts from sinful and broken to righteous. We can call God Father and we desire to imitate His holiness only because He has transformed our hearts, set us from our sin nature, and empowers us to pursue holiness.

[THEREFORE]**Why should the pursuit of holiness be the byproduct of a transformed heart?**

When you read Romans 3:9-18, you see a picture of what our sinful hearts were like. After a heart transformation made possible through Jesus, our hearts are different. Colossians 3:12-17 describes what our new hearts look like and the behaviors that result from our heart transformation. When our lives are marked by the fruit of the Spirit, we show that we are pursuing holiness.

[THIS]

Because God does transform our hearts, our desires change and we are set free to imitate God. We receive a new perspective because we are no longer blind to the things of God. Because of the new perspective we have when our hearts are made new, we see sin differently and we feel a conflict that we did not feel before. We get a better understanding of this transformation as we feel the conflict of our old self with our new nature. We feel a guilt and sorrow over our sin that wasn't present before. We also love with a Godly love that wasn't present before. Paul tells us to walk in love in Ephesians 5:2 because we do not naturally do that, but when we have been transformed by God, we can walk in love just like Jesus does.

[THEREFORE]**In what ways have you experienced and are you experiencing the conflict between the old self and the new self?**

Paul addresses the conflict between our old nature, also known as our flesh, and our new nature in Galatians 5:17. The flesh, or old nature is against the Spirit. As we pursue holiness we should feel a conflict as we are faced with temptation to sin, yet desire to be holy. Romans 7:14-25 paints a picture of the struggle that every believer who is pursuing holiness will feel. 1 Corinthians 10:13 reminds us of the truth that with God's help, we can overcome temptation.

Why is a heart transformation necessary to pursue holiness?

Isaiah 59:2 tells us that our sin separates us from God. While we are separated from God, we cannot pursue holiness because we will not know what true holiness is. Isaiah 64:6 teaches us that even the good works we do as sinners are like filthy rags to God. Romans 3:10 reiterates the truth that no one is righteous, so we cannot pursue holiness in our own power.

1. Ephesians 5:1: God makes us new creations which enables us to pursue holiness.

BIG IDEA #2: PURSUING HOLINESS IS MOTIVATED BY THE GOSPEL.²**[THIS]**

Paul continues his description of the believer's pursuit of holiness by explaining the motivation behind the pursuit. In 5:2, Paul says that believers should walk in love and their love should look like Christ's. Jesus loved God and obeyed Him, going to the cross for the world. The believer's motive for pursuing holiness is the gospel. The gospel is the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is the good news that sets sinners free and makes them new in the eyes of God. When we understand the gift of grace and mercy that we have received, we are motivated to pursue holiness out of a love for God.

[THEREFORE]**How can our motive for pursuing holiness be misplaced or misguided?**

Galatians 2:16 teaches us that obeying rules and commandments isn't enough to make us holy. Our hearts must be submitted to God through repentance and belief in Jesus in order to truly be made righteous and to have the ability to pursue holiness. Luke 18:9-14 is a great picture of two people with very different motives concerning seeking God and holiness. When we understand what the gospel has done for us, we will pursue holiness.

[THIS]

Ephesians 5:2 is a great example of how we can pursue holiness. As Paul stated in chapter four, believers are set apart by their love for others. Christ always walked in love during His earthly ministry. We are imitators of God when His love compels us to love Him and others. The gospel involves sacrifice. When we understand the gospel and are motivated by it, we will sacrifice, too. When we are seeking to be holy, our lives will be marked by sacrificial love and obedience to God's Word.

[THEREFORE]**How does your own reflection upon the gospel motivate you to pursue holiness?**

In 1 John 3:16, we see a picture of how the gospel motivates us to pursue the holiness of Christ by loving as He loves. John 15:12 also reminds us that the way we love others reveals our pursuit of holiness. When we fully understand the truth presented in Ephesians 2:8, that it is grace that has saved us, we will be motivated to pursue holiness.

What does it look like practically to "walk in love as Christ loved us"?

Earlier in Ephesians 4:32, Paul says to be tenderhearted and forgiving toward one another. These are attributes of Christ's love for us. In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus teaches that we should love all people, including our enemies and throughout His life on earth, Jesus modeled this type of love. Romans 12:10 shows us that we should outdo one another in showing our affection. A transformed heart enables us to love as Christ loves.

2. Ephesians 5:2; 5:8: *We are children of darkness in our sin, yet Christ sacrificed Himself for us. Because of this, we pursue holiness.*

BIG IDEA #3: PURSUING HOLINESS IS CHOOSING TO REJECT AND FLEE WHAT IS SINFUL AND UNWISE.³

[THIS]

Our pursuit of holiness involves choosing to die to our sinful desires everyday. Dying to our sinful desires means choosing daily to reject what is sinful. Paul lists some of the sinful behaviors we should reject in Ephesians 5:3-14. Sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthy and foolish talk, and crude joking are just some of the sinful behaviors that we should reject and flee. This list is not exhaustive, but offers us a look at what it means to be holy before God. Paul teaches that we should be so far removed from these types of behaviors that no one would even consider them to be a part of our character. Our pursuit of holiness is an active turning away from everything sinful. We can know what is sinful by studying God's Word and walking in obedience to it. Jesus set the example for our pursuit of holiness by living a sinless life, completely obedient to the Father.

[THEREFORE]**What does it look like for you to actively reject sin in your life?**

2 Timothy 2:22 gives us the way to actively reject sin. When we are fleeing our youthful passions and pursuing righteousness, we will reject sin. Philippians 4:4-9 gives us a picture of what it means to live for Christ and to pursue holy things as opposed to giving in to our sin natures.

[THIS]

In Ephesians 5:6-14, Paul continues to describe the way a believer pursues holiness. Our pursuit involves rejecting any unwise idea, thought, or behavior. James 1:5 tells us that if we lack wisdom, God gives generously. As believers, we are not to be deceived by flattery or empty words. We are to reject and flee anything that does not align with God's Word. We are not to fall prey to the darkness of the world, but instead should pursue holiness and seek to be a light in the world. Our pursuit of holiness involves discerning what pleases God and living according to His will.

[THEREFORE]**How does walking in wisdom help us to imitate God and reject sin?**

Ephesians 5:6-16 tells us that wise living makes the most of our time here on earth. When we are wise, we understand that this life is short and that we are called to bring God glory in everything we do. James 3:17 also shows us what behaviors result from wise living. When we pursue holiness, we will grow in our wisdom.

In what ways can we be deceived by empty words?

Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us that our hearts are wicked and deceptive. Because our hearts cannot be trusted, it is easy for us to be led away by flattery or untruth. Romans 16:17-19 gives us a picture of what it looks like to be deceived and the reason we are deceived. When we are not rooted in the knowledge of God's Word, we are easily led astray. As we pursue holiness, we will grow in our knowledge of God's Word.

3. Ephesians 5:3-14: In these verses, Paul teaches us how to live holy lives before the Lord.